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TASMANIAN TIGER HUNT
WHY WHALES STRAND :: MANTISPA, DAINTY KILLER

MONTHLY
1/-

Collingwood Range and Valley, with the Raglan Range in the distance. Near this spot a Thylacine was seen crossing the road at night, in September, 1945.



TASMANIAN TIGER HUNT

Four Months in the Land of the Thylacine

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Probably the rarest of the world's living mammals, the Tasmanian Tiger or Thylacine or Marsupial Wolf has been a focus of scientific attention over the last ten or fifteen years, but in that period not one specimen has been captured or seen at close quarters. Mr David Fleay, one of Australia's most competent practical zoologists, has just returned from a four-months' search for a pair, from which he hoped to breed. This is his account of the party's adventures.

JUST seven years ago Mr M. S. R. Sharland gave an excellent account* of an expedition to the great rugged basin south of the Tasmanian West Coast road, bounded by mighty saw-toothed "prehistoric" mountains, in quest of traces of the remarkable marsupial wolf. In the last ten or fifteen years the Tasmanian Animals and Birds' Protection Board has sent out several expeditions to the wilder parts of Tasmania to estimate the distribution of the Thylacine, and the investigation of 1938 led by such good bushmen and observers as Inspector Arthur Fleming and Mr Sharland was the most productive of all.

Here, in this rough, wet country bounded by Frenchman, Surveyor, Deception, Prince of Wales, and King William Ranges, and reached by foot from the West Coast road (opened only in 1932), Fleming and Sharland found many undoubted footprints of their quarry in a comparatively short time and over a good stretch of country.

Careful study of Mr Sharland's reports had convinced me that an expedition organised with the

aim of securing living specimens of this largest carnivorous marsupial would be well advised to work in this same part of Tasmania, particularly along the Jane River, where tracks had been most plentiful.

So in November, 1945, our party entered the wilderness of the silent South-west, where the jagged mountains reared their bare, stony tops in awe-inspiring grandeur; where the rivers so often in flood rushed through rocky myrtle-grown gorges; and where, away from the few tracks, progress was limited to a painful struggle through clinging Bauera and mazes of horizontal scrub, or to difficult plodding through button-grass swamps. We were to penetrate to the furthestmost points used by miners and prospectors of the Jane River country, to work in snow, frost and floods, and to camp in such widely separated places as the Jane River, the Raglan, Collingwood, Mt. Hardy, and King William Ranges, and the Lake St. Clair reserve, laying trails, trapping day by day, investigating caves, rock shelters and tracks, and walking the bush by night, to gain an idea of the other marsupials of the West Coast apart from our rare primary quarry.

* Sharland, M.S.R., *Tracking Thylacine*, *Wild Life*, June, 1939.

Good and capable mates who helped me in the many phases of these months in the bush were Major Gavan Crawl, Mr Roy Alderson, ex-Tasmanian bushman who had captured Thylacines in his younger days, Inspector Arthur Fleming of the Fauna Board, who led the 1938 expedition, Don Davie, Alan Batchelor, Alf. Triffet and Jack Daly, ex-packer and prospector, and, not least, Mrs Fleay, who lived under canvas in bad weather with mosquitoes, snakes and washaway rains adding to her discomforts.

TOO BARREN FOR ANYTHING

THE fact that the Thylacine has been able to hold on to life at all in the west, following its total extermination in the settled areas of eastern Tasmania, is understood when one reaches the edge of the open woodland central plateau at Mt. Arrowsmith. Here a vast change in country, scenery and flora occurs. One looks over great areas of broken country, the more or less orthodox pink dolerite of Mt. King William to the left and Mt. Gell to the right giving place to range upon range of conglomerate mountains with white quartzite outcrops gleaming like snow. The descent into the Surprise Valley with its deep timber-choked gorges takes one's breath away. Even the Bettongs or Rat-kangaroos stop short at the edge of Arrowsmith—not for them the dense rain forests, the soggy button-grass flats and the tangled barren mineral country of the west, where it rains eight days out of ten, and where the range-tops, usually lost in cloud, are frequently snow-capped even in summer.

Hunting at night in this wilderness, like its smaller relatives the devils and dasyures, the tawny grey Thylacine, so distinctively marked with the brown transverse stripes on lower back and tail base, was not often seen even in the days when it was plentiful. With its peculiarly rigid hindquarters and tail, its long body and comparatively short legs, the animal progresses with a characteristic bounding gait. One of the outstanding features of this ancient counterpart of the modern dog and wolf is its amazing jaw-gape. When yawning its upper and lower jaws form almost a straight line!

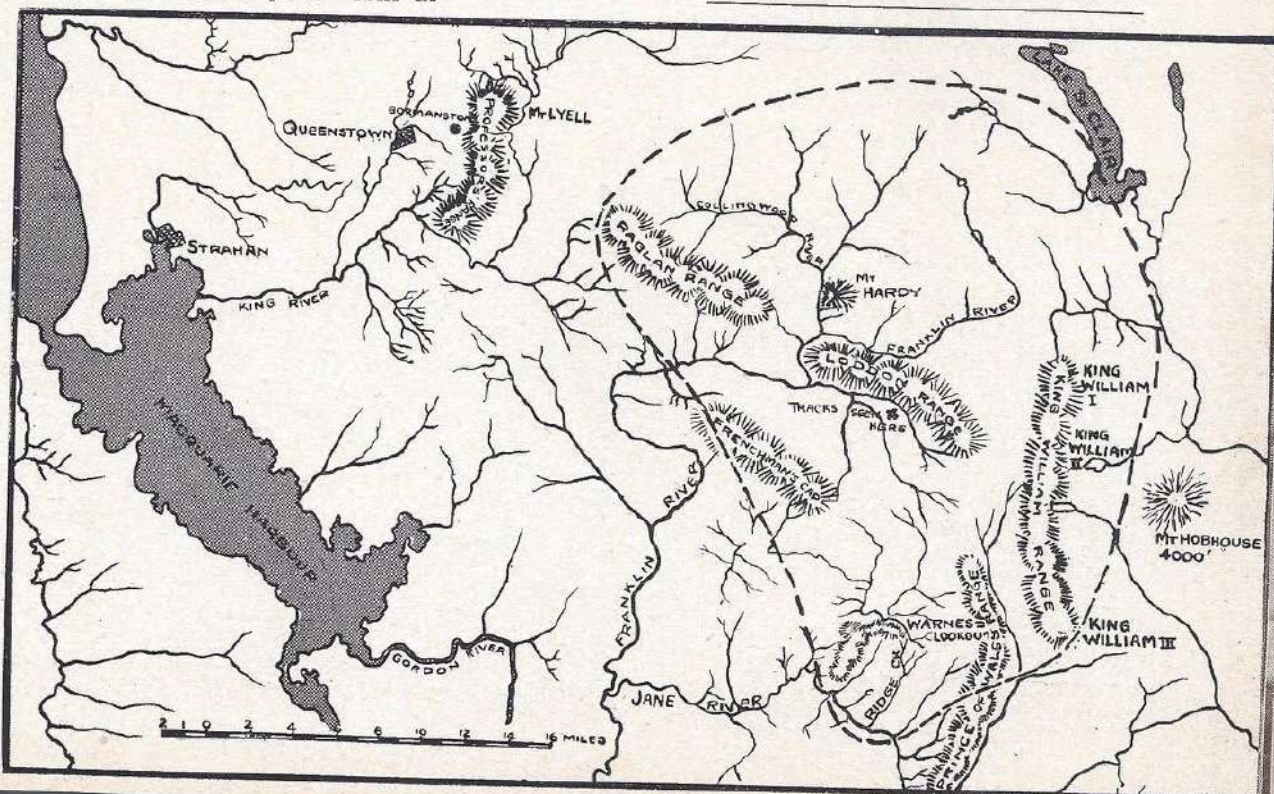
In all our ramblings over the tracks, animal pads and mud of the south-west, all eyes concentrated on the ground. We wanted Thylacine tracks, regular ones if possible, so that we could settle down in the right places to periods of systematic trapping.

Not easily confused with the prints of other animals, and quite undoglike, though leaving an impression superficially resembling the imprint of a wombat's front foot, the track of a "tiger's" forepaw is typically round and some three inches in diameter. The five long-clawed digits well indented are spaced and visible, not being obscured by prominent pads as in the case of the dog. The Thylacine's two main cushion pads, one large and one small, leave no strong impression and form a rough crescent at the base of the digits around the palm.

TRAPS AND BAITS

JOURNEYING down the corduroy pack-horse track to Jane River goldfield, along which incidentally Bob Warne once walked at night carrying nuggets to the value of £1200, we made our base in a slab hut, to set out day after day in different directions, "prospecting." We set up several of our large steel-framed chain-wire traps along the Erebus River, a tributary of the Jane, where in the typically clear water stained a weak tea color from percolation through the peat of the button grass, unafraid platypuses swam in the shelter of dark and gloomy myrtle (*Nothofagus*) forests. The doors of these stout structures automatically locked when released by a pull on the hook within, and naturally some camouflage of earth and leaves on the floor was employed. Fresh, attractive bait was highly important, particularly as the Thylacine is a fastidious eater. Bacon was always a good standby, firstly because we found its taste and salt content appealed to all the carnivorous marsupials we met, secondly because of its comparative immunity from attack by Tasmania's over-diligent blowflies, and

Map of the region traversed by the expedition in search of the Thylacine. Strahan, on Macquarie Harbor, is on the west coast of Tasmania. Poverty Plain, where the first tracks were picked up, is south of Loddon Range, marked with a cross. Broken line bounds the area of the search. Mt. Arrowsmith (not marked) is due east of Mt. Hardy.





Jane River Hostel, used by the 1938 party and since adopted as a base by trappers. No sign of the Thylacine was found in the vicinity by the 1945-46 expedition.

thirdly, it was hopeful, because of the persistent stories told by old-timers of the Thylacine's habit of licking out frying-pans and thieving bacon hanging about in camps. Men such as Roy Alderson had caught "tigers" in box traps on bacon bait in the days when they brought in living specimens slung on poles to the late James Harrison, of Wynyard, who in turn disposed of them to zoos all over the world. Live decoys used in association with the traps on the Erebus included several fowls and ducks—surely the first poultry ever to reach that remote area!

TRAPPING MAKES GAME SCARCE

UNFORTUNATELY as our investigations progressed, there were ominous indications that a vast change had been wrought in this part of Tasmania. In 1938, before the pack-horse track had been constructed, no professional hunters had worked this region; but now, at the end of 1945, there were snare poles along every track and animal pad of consequence that we traversed. The greater number of these, amounting to at least two or three thousand, were what are known as "neckers," as distinct from "treadle"—or foot—snares. In other words, wallabies and "kangaroos" (large grey Bennett wallabies) or devils—or, in fact, any unfortunate coming along in the winter open season ran their necks into suspended wire nooses and, releasing the sassafras, gum or tea-tree poles, were quickly jerked up and choked.

Game was scarce in all the Jane River country. Bennett wallabies which fed out in open areas were rarely seen, though the dumpy little rufous-bellied wallaby or pademelon was more evident; and "badgers" (wombats) left plentiful footprints out on the flats, ridges and "cricks" (creeks, Tas.) where they fed each night on the tough button-grass clumps. Several snarers told me independently that this stocky Tasmanian species (*Vombatus ursinus*) is particularly susceptible to extra cold. On frosty mornings "badgers" are often found in a torpid state stretched across tussocks and incapable of movement until warmed by the sun. Stripped tussocks in the vicinity of wombat burrows indicate the activities of the animals in manufacturing warm nests underground.

Spiny ant-eaters (Echidnas) were really numerous, and were more hairy and less spiny than mainland specimens—a condition associated with the colder climate. Some were creamy-white in color and one we inspected was, from the state of its developed pouch, a nursing mother with a baby parked in the vicinity. I had never seen anything like the numbers of ant-eaters and platypuses encountered in Tasmania, and obviously among other things the Island State is our richest preserve of these, the world's only two egg-laying mammals.

We captured a number of large and very black tiger snakes. Though some showed faint bands of lighter color on the flanks, nearly all were as black and glossy as the true black snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*) of the mainland. However, they lacked the carmine colored ventral scales and the small heads of the *Pseudechis* species. For want of better accommodation, the snakes we caught were housed in an old camp oven, where they settled down quite well, being more amiable and sluggish in disposition than the banded "tigers" of the mainland.

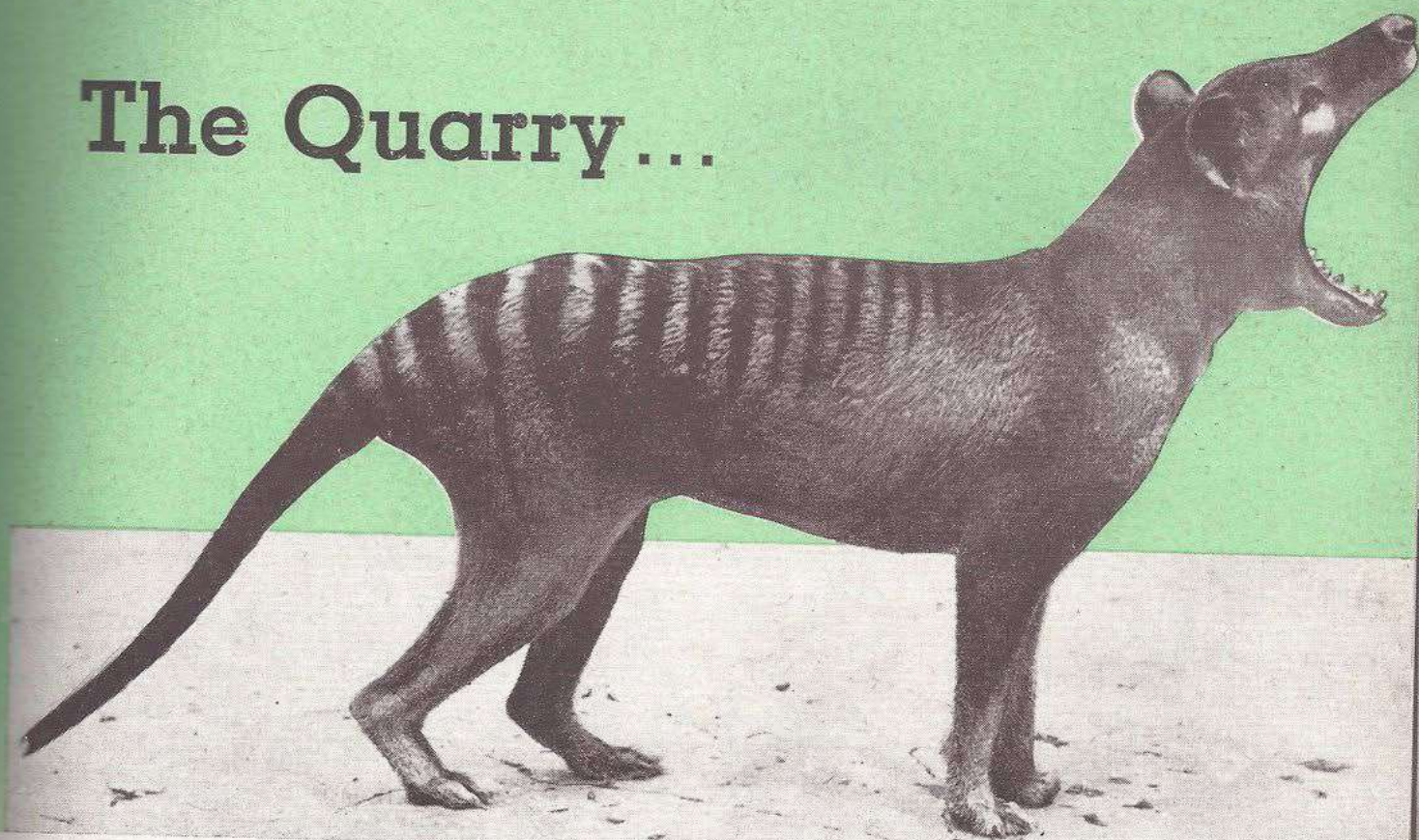
Associated with the large number of snares there was a complete absence of marsupial wolf tracks. It is understandable, of course, that, from the professional hunter's point of view, carnivorous creatures that are in the habit of tearing up wallabies in snares and spoiling their skins would merit a swift fate when caught, and it is undoubtedly true that skin-hunters have played a very large part in bringing the Thylacine so quickly to the brink of extinction.

STORIES OF THE THYLACINE

YARNS with bushmen up and down the west coast brought to light a number of interesting points bearing on the habits of the Thylacine. It is an undoubted fact that nearly all dogs will shirk an encounter with this pouched carnivore, and on scenting it they usually come to heel with bristling backs and tail between the legs. Horses also exhibit a deal of nervousness on scenting or hearing the "hyaena" (the local name for it) anywhere near camp at night. At the Erebus River crossing on the way to Jane Field, Don Davie showed us a camp where on a dark night in the snaring season several years ago, "Nigger," our one-eyed pack-horse, had snorted and plunged in alarm as a marsupial wolf ranged along the river uttering its remarkable creaking "bark."

The Davie brothers, able bushmen and keen hunters, had another experience of the Thylacine six years ago on Gum Ridge, a range in trackless country six miles south of the Jane Field. Here on a moonlight night, a peculiar, husky animal voice—neither cat nor dog, as Ernie Davie described it, possessing some of the peculiarities of both—drew the brothers' attention to no less a (Pictures in the following five pages; narrative continued on page 205).

The Quarry...



The last thylacine in captivity, dead now these many years. Its general contours are wolf-like, but the tail is the characteristic marsupial appendage tapering from a broad base. The brownish bands are responsible for the vernacular name of "tiger." The jaws at full gape open almost to a straight line—this specimen was just finishing a yawn.

—David Fleay photo. copyright.

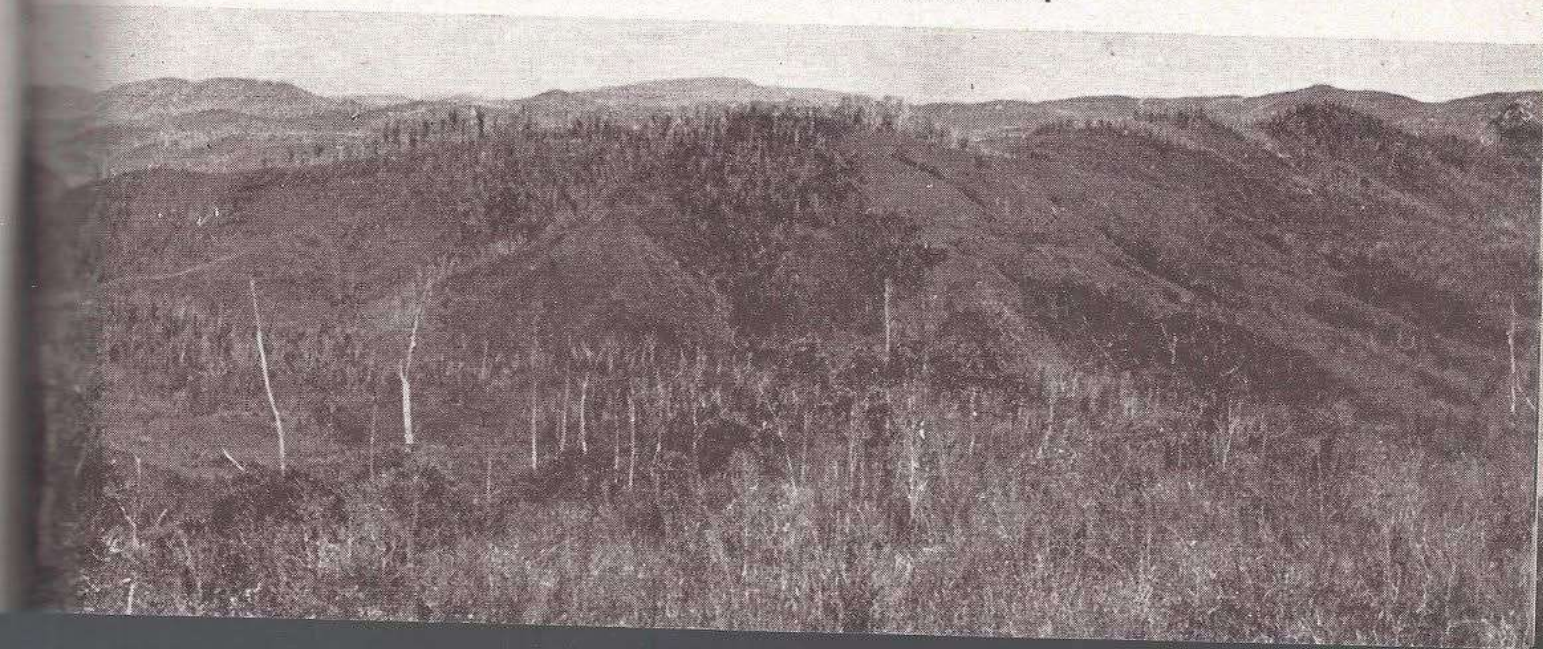
Hunting for Thylacines is no child's play, as the pictorial record of the expedition demonstrates in the following pages. Other than the notorious black tiger-snake there are no deadly animals, but the country is some of the most difficult in the whole of the Commonwealth, and large areas are utterly impenetrable because of button-grass swamps and horizontal scrub. Here is the "tiger's" last stronghold.

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... and the Country

Panorama from Warne's Lookout to Prince of Wales Range (see map, page 187). This is "tiger country," wild, impenetrable, silent. All the valleys are full of horizontal scrub, and what appears to be open country is button-grass swamp.

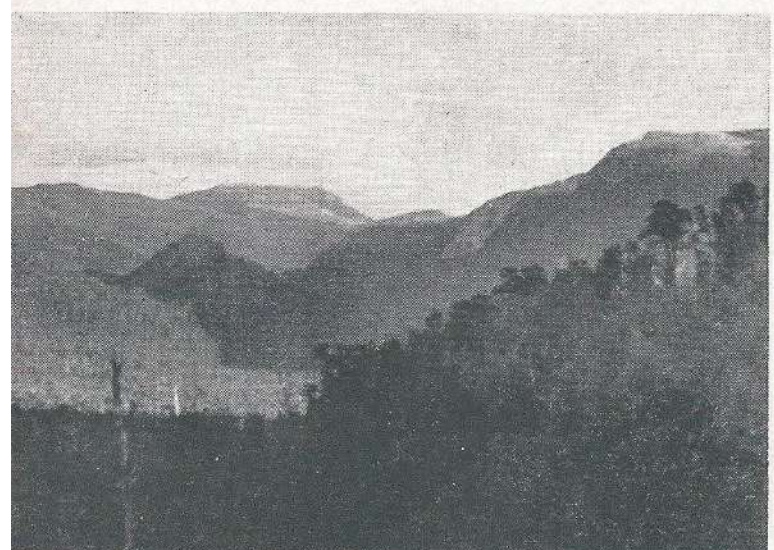




Social life was not altogether lacking, even in these austere surroundings. At the Base Camp at Collingwood River the party was visited by Mr. Michael Sharland, the noted Tasmanian naturalist. Mrs. Fleay is seen here with Mr. and Mrs. Sharland and family.



Mount King William I, northernmost point of the King William Range. The foreground shows the button-grass characteristic of the swampy areas, forming an almost impassable type of country. Native Cats were abundant here, feeding principally on swamp yabbies.



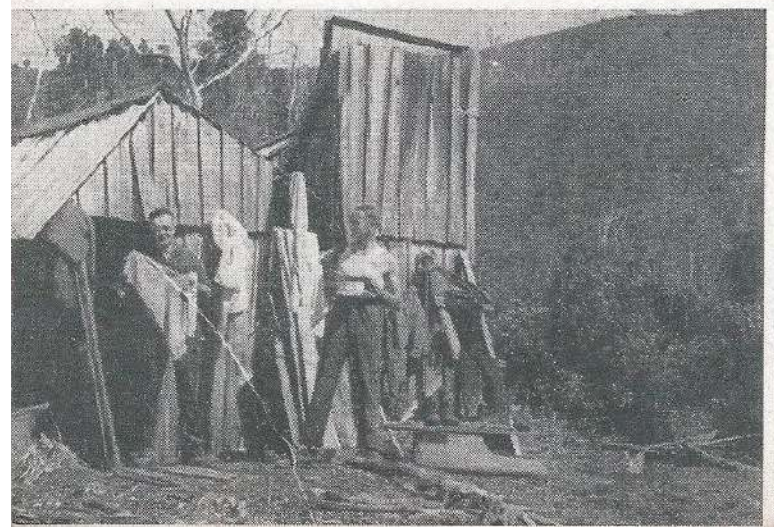
Looking towards the Prince of Wales Range country, over the Surprise Valley. Mount King William II is on the left, and on the right the Loddon Hills. One must follow the crests of the ranges here; the valleys are impenetrable.



Middle Dump Hut, on the old abandoned and overgrown trail to the Jane River Goldfields, just below Calder Pass. This mountainous country has an extremely high rainfall, and the party was weatherbound in the hut for some time.

Smithie's Slab Hut, the first base used by the expedition in November last year. Mr. Roy Alderson and Major Crowl enjoying a rare, bright morning before a hike. Native Cats made nocturnal raids on the meat bag hanging between the two men.

Following the crests of the mountains, the only route by which any progress could be made. The men are Messrs. Don Davie (left), David Fleay, and Roy Alderson (right), with Nigger, the sure-footed, one-eyed pack horse; Mt. Gell, cloud-capped, in the distance.





Gigantic Native Cat, almost twice normal size but normal in coat pattern, and an average-sized specimen of the rare black type, both caught near the King William Range.

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Mr Stan Byrne, driver of the Queenstown to Hobart "freighter," inspecting a remarkable specimen of Tasmanian Devil—a female, devoid of white markings save for a small "star" on the breast, caught at the Collingwood River.



This young Bennett's Wallaby had been caught by both hind feet in a snare. When Tasmanian bushmen speak of the kangaroo, this is usually the creature to which they are referring.

Bettong, smallest Tasmanian representative of the kangaroo family, lives in the forest country, but does not favor the button-grass or the dense coastal forests. This one was taken on the plains above Mt. Arrowsmith.





Black cockatoos did the work shown in these three pictures. In their search for wood-boring grubs they make the sassafras trees look like fantastically carved totem poles (left), while the piles of chips they leave (centre) would do credit to the family wood-chopper. The axe gives a scale to the picture on the right.



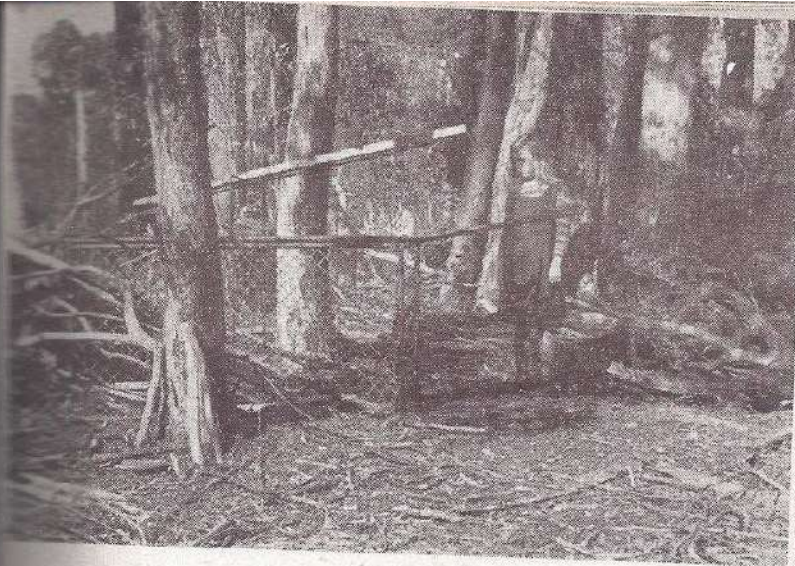
Nigger, the pack-horse, with Don Davie, sets out for home again after packing gear to Ridge Creek. Nigger is one-eyed and old, but as sure-footed as a mountain goat.

Tasmanian Red Waratah (*Telopea truncata*). It is smaller than the New South Wales species, and neater than the Victorian, with comparatively few florets to each head.

Tasmanian echidna, not distinguished as a separate species, but distinctive in possessing thicker fur and fewer spines than the mainland type, due to the colder climate.

Spring necker snare which fur-trappers set along animal pads. It has at least the moderate virtue of choking its victims quickly. The wire noose is made fast to a springy stick which is bent over and hooked lightly under a prong (left). The animal runs its head into the noose (demonstrated by hand in centre picture), releasing the stick which flies up, tightening the noose (right).





Betty Fleay inspects a chain wire box-type trap set up on a dry knoll. Each evening miles of scent trails were laid leading to the doors of such traps. At the foot of this trap the heavy chain wire was wrenched out of shape by a Tasmanian Devil's powerful jaws.

In addition to the traps, strong stockades were set up with sheep and poultry inside to lure the Thylacines into the area where the cage traps were set. These were spread over miles of country in the region where footprints were seen, and each had to be tended daily.

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Finding the first footprints. The series ran down a track on Poverty Plain, a button-grass area (see map, page 187) so swampy that the only hope of crossing is by corduroy tracks of logs. The bicycles were wheeled seven miles along this track to carry gear—there is no hope of riding a bicycle in this country, and the track is impassable to any larger vehicle. Inset: plaster cast of the left front foot of the Thylacine obtained at this spot. The digits and claws and the two main pads may be traced forming a rounded imprint quite distinct from the track of any other animal.



Tasmanian Tiger Hunt: Continued from page 188

visitor than a Thylacine standing on a log 50 yards distant. The animal called at intervals for a good 10 minutes before disappearing. So many bushmen describe similar happenings in past years, all asserting that the cries circling a camp were indicative of hunting activities, that I began to suspect that it was actually the Thylacine's instinct of curiosity and puzzlement that caused such a reaction. Many marsupials perform in similar fashion.

In early February confirmation of this was afforded us during a sortie via the old Jane River foot track round the base of the Frenchman Range towards Thirkell's Creek. A day-long plod with massive packs over a seemingly everlasting and frightfully soggy plain of buttongrass brought us to the Middle Dump Hut just below Calder's Pass at dusk. That night, as we sat before the fire, there came from an adjacent high hillside a most extraordinary cry. It suggested the brief sharp creak of a door and was quite unlike any cry of a mammal or bird I had ever heard. Immediately came the recollection of what the Davie brothers and Tasmanian old-timers had said of the "tiger's" voice. Here, at last, it seemed, we were listening to the cry of an animal that in our estimation was almost a phantom. The remarkable voice came only three times during the night. Unfortunately, concentration on this area produced no results.

Only Two Years Ago

INVESTIGATION of the fire-blasted Raglan Range yielded nothing of value, but treated us to a magnificent January show of red and yellow Blandfordia rock lilies. From the Raglan summit unfolded an awe-inspiring view of the mighty Frenchman Range to the south-east. Mick Tiffin, road patrolman of the Cardigan River, which runs down from the Raglan, told me of a unique experience that befell him two years before. In fact, he took me to the scene of the incident—a great fallen tree butt with a sheltered cavity at its base. Mr. Tiffin had been crosscutting the trunk of this fallen warrior for firewood and as the last section fell he was frightened out of his wits by a "tiger" which jumped out from the cavity where it had been all the time, uttered a husky cry and bounded into the scrub. The scare was mutual, but according to Mick, the animal must have been terrified if it received only half the fright that he did! From the description of size, this Thylacine was undoubtedly a young specimen, particularly as the incident occurred about the month of April.

In late November, 1945, when crimson waratahs were glorious in the bush, we had spent several weeks in the great game sanctuary of Lake St. Clair. Here, on the advice of Mr. A. D. Fergusson, one of Tasmania's best known characters and an expert bushman, we made intensive searches of the Lake Hugel area, lumping the heavy traps three and a quarter miles up a thousand-foot rise to set them among the rocky mountain tarns, about which grew stunted gums, low pencil cedars (*Arthrotaxis cupressioides*), and other alpine growth.

Here last winter Fergie had found tracks in the snow, revealing the story of the relentless pursuit by a "tiger" of a Bennett wallaby right into the bitterly cold waters of the lake. This last refuge, so typical of hard-pressed members of the kangaroo family, is evidently no protection from the persistent Thylacine, which readily follows its prey into lakes and across rivers. Consensus of opinion is that on killing its prey the Thylacine opens the thorax and devours such delicacies as the heart and then the liver. Two skeletons of Bennett wallabies found on the Collingwood River showed evidence of such treatment, and for some extraordinary reason they had not been dismembered by devils.

One solitary and somewhat doubtful footprint, between button-grass clumps, was the sole piece of evidence attending our search of the

THESE HELPED

Financial support for the Thylacine expedition was given by The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd., proprietors of Wild Life; the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria; the University of Melbourne; the Royal Zoological and Acclimatisation Society of Victoria; Edward B. Green, Esq.; and K. Byron Moore, Esq. The truck used was loaned by the Department of the Army through Brigadier A. W. Wardell, and co-operation was provided throughout by the Animals and Birds Protection Board of Tasmania.

Lake St. Clair region for "tigers." There is every attraction for such predators here, and undoubtedly there are one or two about; for, thanks to the protection given this great 365,000 acres reserve, game is particularly plentiful, especially in such places as the Cuvier Valley. There is no comparable game sanctuary in any other State, and Tasmania is to be applauded for her foresight.

Notes on Other Fauna

DURING the course of the expedition, with its routine of scanning tracks, laying trails, replenishing baits, feeding decoy animals and searching new country, observations were made on other members of the Tasmanian fauna. No greater proof of the grimness and essentially Tasmanian nature of the rough country below Arrowsmith is the fact that the versatile rabbit is unknown there; neither is there a trace of the introduced brown or black rats. The only non-indigenous elements I observed in the whole of that inhospitable region were a solitary English blackbird and a pair of English goldfinches, both away down in the vicinity of the Jane goldfield. Unfortunately, however, lost domestic cats—now fierce feral animals—were

fairly common. I watched one stalking a lovely little blue-winged grass parrot and luckily managed to shoot it.

A number of others caught in our wire traps were promptly liquidated. Their presence bodes ill for small marsupials and for the rare ground parrot, which was both seen and heard near the Collingwood Range.

In the absence of foreign rodents, it was highly interesting to meet two of Tasmania's four species of native rats. The water-rat was not seen in any of the numerous swift, cold streams, nor was the broad-toothed rat encountered, but in the Jane River slab huts and along the Franklin River we caught six specimens of the graceful buffy-brown, long-eared and long-tailed Pseudo Rat (*Pseudomys higginsii*).

In swampy localities where it had long runways through the vegetation, and where it fed on roots, inner bark and seeds, we caught a number of the blackish-brown Eastern Swamp Rats (*Rattus lutreolus*). This dense-furred little fellow is the common species on the West Coast, and often at night these rats sprang some of our dasyure traps by pulling at bacon baits. It was observed that the droppings of one tiger cat (*Dasyurops maculatus*) captured in a Thylacine trap contained a large amount of the Eastern Swamp Rat's fur.

Little was seen of the large and stoutly-built Tasmanian Brush-possum (*Trichosurus fuliginosus*) though one big black fellow was caught on a bacon bait. On Arrowsmith one night we met a lovely specimen of the rarer silver-grey type, much sought after by trappers.

The Tasmanian Ringtail (*Pseudocheirus convolutor*), half as large again as the South-eastern Ringtail of Victoria (*P. lamiginosus*), was met at night in the glowworm-studded myrtle forests, in the eucalypts of the central plateau, and at Lake St. Clair. It invariably gave its position away to searching torch beams by a slow throbbing whistle, distinct from the quick sibilant hiss of the Victorian animal. This nest-building species was also more equable in temperament and usually allowed one to approach it closely.

Devils Eat Tiger Snakes

WE caught nineteen devils (*Sarcophilus harrisi*) in the wire traps, some fully grown, others half-grown specimens of the previous winter's breeding season. One bristling-whiskered mother had the maximum number of four joeys bulging out of her pouch. Most of the devils in this south-west region were almost completely black, with the merest traces of the usually large white patches on rump, chest and shoulders and found in devils farther north and east. One big fellow whose footprints had been found superimposed on our own of previous days was trapped one morning, and when we turned him loose he ran straight for the river bank, plunged into the icy depths of the Erebus, and swam strongly across to scamper away among the ferns of the opposite bank.

Some large males twisted the chain wire of the traps with their powerful jaws in a phenomenal fashion. One cut a way right through the wire and escaped, leaving a fringe of black hair around the opening.

It was Mrs Fleay's discovery that devils kill and eat black tiger snakes. Droppings found in more than one locality contained scales, vertebrae and ribs of these reptiles. Also in the droppings were skins of the friendly and pretty little Tasmanian lizard, *Lygosoma casuarinae*, and more commonly the fur of the Rufous-bellied Wallaby. Fergie, of Lake St. Clair, tells of one old, old devil that rushed in one winter's night and attempted to drag his cat away from the hearth for its supper!

Entering the cage traps on hands and knees to remove captured devils was a test of nerves. Slow, deliberate movements were the order of the day; rapidity of action would mean disaster. The only mishap for the trip, apart from the two devils that ran about the deck of the steamer all night on the way home, was a nice "quick" bite on the elbow from the last devil to be captured.

Other animals, too, were snared and caught. There were Bennett wallabies, more pademelons, spiny ant-eaters, lizards, tiger-cats and native cats (*Dasyurus quoll*) — both black and yellowish grey types. We also observed the little sugar glider of the mainland, (*Petaurus breviceps*) said to have been introduced to Tasmania in the 1830's.

Fresh Tracks at Last

EMPHASISING the change that has occurred in this country since the days of the 1938 expedition, it was not until early February of this year that we succeeded in finding a perfectly unmistakable and fresh series of tracks made by a Thylacine no more than 24 hours previously. Rain is too frequent for impressions to last for more than a few days in this country; but these footprints on Poverty Plain on the Jane pack track were beauties, running for 100 yards down the track and then turning off to the button grass whence they had come. We had no doubts at all about the animal responsible, for I was carrying with me, for comparison, a plaster cast of the Thylacine fore-foot kindly loaned by Dr. Joseph Pearson, director of the Hobart Museum.

On this occasion we were on yet another trip towards the upper reaches of the Jane River near Lightning Plain, and on the first night, notable for a brilliant display of the Aurora australis, we were fortunate in catching one of the uncommon black native cats. For forty miles I carried this marsupial, and now at Healesville she has claims to being quite a tourist.

On down to the Erebus, along the river and across open button grass once again to the lower end of Thirkell's Creek, thence on the second day to the pinner's cabin on a knoll above the deep and dark Jane River. We had passed wire necker snares by the hundred. Game was again as scarce as we had found it nearer the Janefield in November; and though we searched most carefully, there was not the slightest sign to indicate the presence of Thylacines.

In spite of the favorable conditions, with the complete absence of piners, prospectors and hunters, snaring in recent season had done its work only too well.

Nevertheless, we had one card up our sleeves, namely, the tracks (now sadly rainworn) on the Three-Mile near Poverty Plain. If the "tiger" had been there so recently, surely sooner or later it would return, particularly as this was a natural gateway between the Loddon and Surprise Valleys.

No time was wasted in bringing the truckload of traps from the Collingwood and taking them by means of Nigger, the pack horse, to the new prospect. They were set at intervals along a mile section. Two strong palisades were erected for sheep decoys, a third for a young Bennett Wallaby and a fourth for a Brush Possum. I had caught the little Bennett Wallaby by the tail at night in the bush and had thought myself very clever until it was discovered that she was totally blind, though otherwise quite healthy and well.

Having dispersed these varying types of traps and decoys, we now settled down to the tedious but necessary job of each evening laying scent trails for miles and placing fresh baits such as sheep's hearts and livers on the hooks to attract the fastidious Thylacine. Owing to the precocious blowflies, no bait was of any use for the purpose even as early as an hour after sunrise. The decoy animals also had to be fed and kept clean and it was usually a difficult job to find sufficient green food for them.

He Got Away!

IT was a somewhat deserted locality here, with few devils and no native cats. This was an advantageous state of affairs, as the traps remained undisturbed and ready for the purpose in hand. Days and weeks went by. One morning an absolutely jet-black Devil was sitting in a wire trap; and another night a tiger cat, small, but fierce, cousin of the Thylacine and devil, reconnoitred the cage traps. Footprints in the mud betrayed the way in which he had circled the whole system, following the scent trail. Next night he tried some bacon and was ours.

Taking him out of the trap was a nerve-racking job, for with hair standing on end and jaws gaping widely, he flew at me time and again, uttering the most piercing "circular saw" screeches.

A whole month elapsed with little further excitement than the capture of two more wild domestic cats. In what spare time there was we prospected the King William I range, where game was fairly plentiful and where, among 11 native cats handled, we found one male specimen which was as big as a medium tiger-cat.

Then, following an evening of drenching rain and only 10 days before the end of the trip, the Poverty Plain Thylacine, or another of its kind, came by the traps at last. Picking out the blind Bennett wallaby in its stockade and endeavoring to reach it, the "tiger" evidently approached crouching low, and, unfortunately for us, instead of being held by a paw in the special trap, all we

caught was a tuft of hair from the would-be marauder's shoulder or chest; and he got away.

It was a most bitter disappointment after the long weeks of work in that wet, cold and silent region. However, the visitor could not have been unduly alarmed, for two nights later, beside footprints there were droppings such as oldtime bushmen had described, and which we now saw for the first time. Twice as large as those of the largest devil, the droppings of this marsupial wolf were dark and somewhat soft, and as compared with those of a devil, contained so little fur or hair, that in order to discover any a careful dissection was necessary.

This time the animal had come within close range of a pen from which a sheep had not long been removed.

So, at an interesting stage, I had reluctantly to leave it all. Thanks to the continued co-operation of the Tasmanian Animals' and Birds' Protection Board, we have been permitted to continue the quest, and at the moment three traps are still being kept in operation by local bushmen. It is hoped that in the coming snow time, the Thylacine's keener appetite may overcome his caution and we may perhaps be successful. In any case, in the interests of securing a pair of these remarkable creatures, even at this late stage when odd roaming individuals are the best that one can hope for, I intend, with the help of the Tasmanian authorities, to continue the search, proceeding on the next trip to country where snares have never been known. There is also, of course, the strong likelihood that snarers, somewhere, will accidentally secure odd specimens.

Chances of Survival

IT is my firm belief that there is only one means of giving the Thylacine a fighting chance of survival, comparatively short-lived like devils and dasyures as it probably is, and of slowing the process of extinction. That is to prohibit snaring in any form in the whole South-Western area from the West Coast Road down to Port Davey and South-West Cape. At least it could be given a ten years' trial.

In 1939, Sharland forecast possible disaster once hunters worked the area traversed by the expedition he accompanied. How quickly that prophecy is coming true!

Records of the Thylacine's life history are only fragmentary and the matter of its study brooks of no delay. The matter is urgent, and must be dealt with now if it is ever to be done at all. Not only is the marsupial wolf of great importance, but as compared with the more settled regions of the mainland, Tasmania's wild country is an invaluable storehouse of other fauna safe from such destructive agencies as close settlement and the introduced fox of mainland Australia. Particularly, it is the home of smaller carnivorous species, either long gone or else disappearing rapidly from the land across Bass Strait, largely because we have no such naturally dense, broken and unsettled mountainous country to give them natural sanctuary. It is a matter not for Tasmania alone, but for the whole of Australia, that this faunal region be preserved.